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Oct. 19, 2007

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WASHINGTON-A delegation of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom is traveling to Vietnam on Oct. 21-Nov. 2 to discuss current conditions for freedom of religion and related human rights. The delegation, led by Commission Chair Michael Cromartie, is scheduled to visit Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue and the Central Highlands.

"Religious freedom and related human rights are critical issues to address directly and openly in what is a growing U.S.-Vietnamese relationship," Cromartie said. "We plan to hold discussions with high-ranking government officials, religious leaders, and other knowledgeable Vietnamese citizens to explore ways to further expand the internationally guaranteed freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in Vietnam."

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan federal commission, consisting of nine private citizens, that advises the President, Secretary of State, and Congress on how to promote religious freedom and associated rights around the world. It was created by the U.S. Congress in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA). Among other responsibilities, the Commission issues annual recommendations on which countries the United States should name Countries of Particular Concern because of systematic and egregious violations of religious freedom. It also compiles a Watch List of countries that require close monitoring due to serious violations.

Vietnam was on the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern from 2004 until 2006. The Commission has recommended that Vietnam be on the CPC list since 2003.

In order to make its annual CPC and Watch List recommendations, the Commission assesses religious freedom conditions first hand. In the past, USCIRF has sent official delegations to Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, France, Egypt, Eritrea, Laos, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This will be the Commission's second trip to Vietnam, following a delegation visit in 2002.

For more information on the Commission's views on the situation in Vietnam and its policy recommendations, see the 2007 Annual Report chapter on Vietnam on the Commission Web site.

**The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Michael Cromartie

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